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ABSTRACT

The sociological factors related to marriage and divorce are discussed in this Population Profile. Statistics concerning marital status, marriage stability, divorce, and remarriage are presented and discussed. Alternate life styles are included in the publication, as well as predictions for the future based on present trends. This publication is only one of a series of 17 concerned with population education. Selected readings for further information are listed on the inside back cover. (MA)

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POPULATION PROFILES

A SERIES OF UNITS ON SPECIFIC TOPICS FOR THE STUDY OF DEMOGRAPHY.

THIS IS UNIT NUMBER 17

THE FAMILY

What Is Its Situation Today? Is It Imperilled As An Institution?

by Mary Ellen Reilly

(Professor Reilly is a member of the Department of Sociology at the University of Rhode Island.)

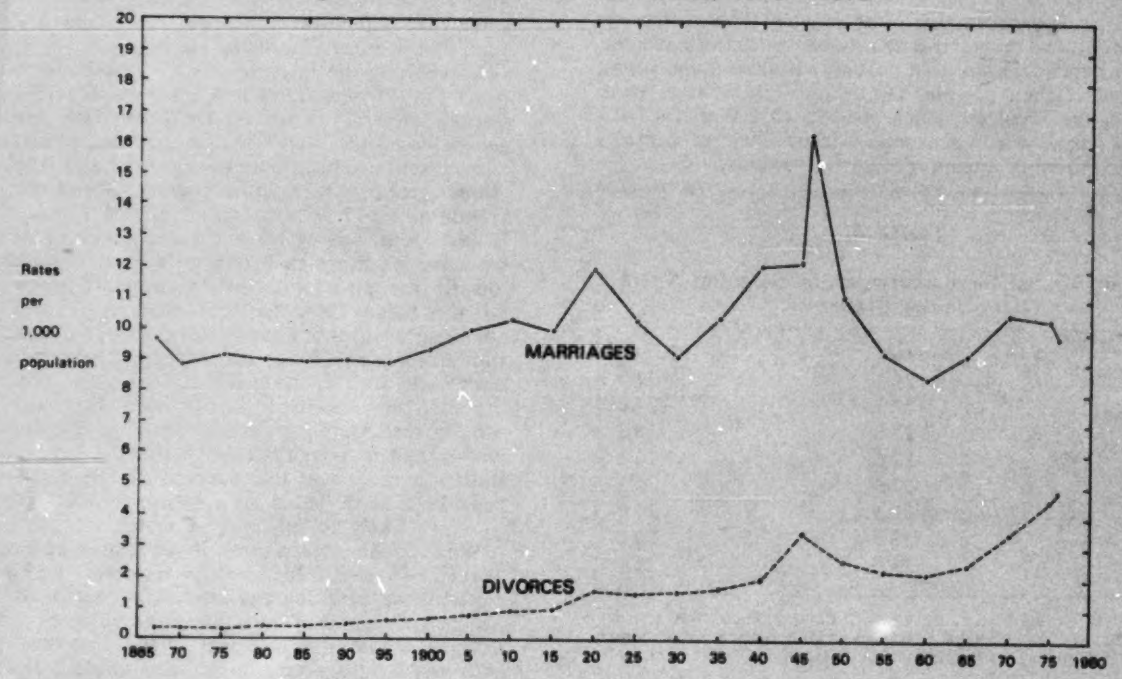
In the mid 1970s a casual observer of the American social scene might sum up impressions in this way: "Marriage is becoming a thing of the past — young people just prefer to live together without all the legal trappings. Besides, why marry? You will just end up in the divorce courts along with most American couples. And the family is archaic too. Group marriages, communes — these are the wave of the future replacing the patriarchal family form that we know today." While this may be overstated, this type of rhetoric is commonly heard in social gatherings and through the media. What is fact and what is fiction? Are we experiencing a dramatic change in our family life? Will marriage and the family persist?

MARRIAGE

Marriage as a way of life appears to be deeply entrenched despite rumors to the contrary. Statistics available on the numbers and rates of marriages in the United States show that there has been little variation for the last century. In 1867 the rate of marriage per 1,000 population was 9.6, i.e., for every 1,000 Americans there were 9.6 marriages in that year. In 1976 the rate was 9.9, reflecting little change from the earlier date. Within this period there has been some variation in marriage rates, and these have been especially pronounced during periods of national emergency. For example, in 1932 when the Great Depression was worsening the rate fell to 7.9, an indication that people hesitated to become involved in a per-

CHART 1

Marriages, Divorces, Rates: United States, 1865 - 1976



BASED ON: U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, *Vital and Health Statistics*, Series 21, No. 24, and *Monthly Vital Statistics Advance Reports*, Vol. 25, No. 1, 2, and 3 supplements.

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manent relationship because of the economic insecurity of the times. On the other hand, in 1946, the rate skyrocketed to 16.4, the highest figure for the 1867-1976 period. The war was over, men were returning home, and the "G.I. Bill of Rights" allowed veterans to take advantage of programs for education, training, and home financing. With these incentives, marriages delayed by the war took place in record numbers. This high rate of marriage contributed to the "Baby Boom" (see Population Profile Number 5, "The Bearing of Children") which is now directly affecting our marriage and divorce statistics as those individuals born in the 1946-1958 period are now maturing and shaping their own futures.

These rates do not fulfill the popular images of a rejection of marriage in the 1970s. There has been a decrease in the number of marriages and in the rates, but it is too early to project this as a long range trend. In fact, it may be one more example of the marriage rate responding to a national economic problem as the United States has been experiencing the most serious inflation, recession, and unemployment since the final days of the Depression.

Since it is apparent that Americans are still choosing to marry in large numbers, let us consider some data concerning the people who marry and those who remain single.

In 1890 the median age at first marriage was 26.1 years for men and 22 years for women. It dropped between 1890 and 1956, when it started climbing again. These changes since the end of the 19th century are due in large measure to rapid industrialization, urbanization, and improving economic conditions which allow young people to obtain jobs away from the rural setting of the earlier era and, therefore, provide them a greater sense of security in forming a new household. Also, the movement from the extended family to the nuclear family comprised of husband, wife and dependent children probably pushed many young adults out of their original family into one of their own. Likewise, the ideology which stresses that marriage is a *sine qua non* to affirm a woman's desirability and a man's maturity probably encourages earlier unions.

TABLE 1

Median Age at First Marriage For Selected Years
United States

Year	Men	Women
1890	26.1	22.0
1940	24.3	21.5
1950	22.8	20.3
1956	22.5	20.1
1960	22.8	20.3
1965	22.8	20.6
1970	23.2	20.8
1975	23.5	21.1

SOURCE: U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Current Population Reports*, Series P-20, No. 287, "Marital Status and Living Arrangements: March 1975." U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., 1975, p. 3.

Median ages at marriage differ by region of the country and race. The regional variations are due in large part to state laws which govern the legal marriage age, and population composition by age, race, sex, and marital status. Of the twelve states which had above average proportions of teenage marriages in 1969, seven were southern states. All but three of the twelve allowed females under 16 years, males under 18, or both, to marry with parental consent.

Racial comparisons indicate that white men have the highest median age at marriage, while Spanish heritage women marry later than their white or black counterparts. This figure for women is probably explained by the attitude held by Spanish families regarding their female members — women are to be protected and carefully supervised before marriage.

TABLE 2

Median Age at First Marriage
By Race and Region: 1970

	Men	Women
Race		
White	23.5	20.8
Black	23.1	20.2
Spanish Heritage	23.2	21.4
Region		
Northeast	24.4	21.7
North Central	23.4	20.7
South	22.8	20.0
West	23.4	20.6

SOURCE: *We, The Americans, Young Marrieds*, U.S. Bureau of the Census, June 1973, pp. 7-8.

In the recent *Virginia Slims Poll* men and women were asked what they considered to be the ideal age to marry. Both sexes agreed on this issue — 22 years for a woman, and 25 years for a man. These "ideal" figures are somewhat higher than the ages for actual marriages: 21 years for women; 23 years for men.

Concerning the question, "Who marries whom?" it appears that "like marries like" is more accurate than "opposites attract." Vast amounts of data indicate that generally people marry within their social class to those with a similar educational background and from the same ethnic group, race, and religion. Sociologist William Goode notes: "It is not surprising, then, that in the United States about half of all marriages occur between people who live no more than one mile from one another, and toward the upper strata the distances are much greater — but this means only that those with social and economic advantages can more easily travel longer distances to find similar spouses." To assess what types of personalities attract each other is more difficult than an investigation of the variables specified. It has been suggested that personality tests should be administered to couples when they obtain their marriage license. If this did occur, long range studies of marriages that succeed or end in divorce could provide us with better information on what types of persons are likely to make good mates.

What do Americans think about remaining single? In the *Virginia Slims Poll* the participants were asked what would be the most satisfying and interesting way of life for them. Ninety-six percent of the women and 92 percent of the men still prefer marriage as a way of life. Only one percent of each sex would prefer to remain single and live alone. These figures compare favorably to those available from the census and they show that women today are less likely to remain single than did females in 1920. In that year, 11 percent of women age 40-44 had never married, while in 1975, 4.8 percent of women and 7.2 percent of the men between ages 40 to 44 were still single.

Sociologist Lucille Duberman notes: "Bachelorhood and spinsterhood are viewed with suspicion in the United States. Social pressure to conform by marrying is applied to single people. Unmarried people are treated, and tend to

think of themselves, as 'different.' Ours is a two-by-two world, and there is little room in it for the unaccompanied individual." Also, in our society, if one desires a permanent, close, loving relationship, marriage is really the only alternative open and acceptable. Should we conclude from this that those who remain single are, in fact, different?

Noted sociologist Jessie Bernard explains who remains single by use of the concept, the marriage gradient. She points out that although marital partners tend to be similar in age, education, and occupation variables, there is a tendency for men to marry women who are slightly below them. Since there are no women below those men at the bottom, these males tend to remain single. On the other hand, since the women at the top are equal to the men at the top they tend not to be selected for marriage or choose not to marry. If a young woman wishes to pursue a career she may have to decide between marriage and her occupation since society assumes that women will be wives and mothers first and, only secondly, workers. The outcome of this selectivity process is described by Bernard: "At every age level, the average single women surpass the average single men . . . But as the marriageable men drop out of the single population, those who are left show up worse and worse as compared with their feminine counterparts, so that twenty years later, at ages forty-five to fifty-four, the gap between them is a veritable chasm. The single women are more educated, have higher average incomes, and are in higher occupations." Data presented in

TABLE 3A

Percent of Persons 35 to 44 Years Old Who Are Single by Education and Sex: 1970

All Races	Males % Single	Females % Single
Elementary:		
Less than 5 years	23.1	20.7
5 to 7 years	10.3	7.2
8 years	8.2	5.3
High School:		
1 to 3 years	7.0	3.9
4 years	6.6	4.5
College:		
1 to 3 years	6.7	5.1
4 years	6.7	7.6
5 years or more	8.4	18.8
Number Single	884,372	672,255
% of total 35 to 44 years who are single	7.9	5.7

SOURCE: U.S. Bureau of the Census. Census of the population: 1970, *Marital Status*. Final Report PC(2)-4C. U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., 1972, pp. 100-141.

the 1970 Census seem to support Bernard's contention. Among men who are between 35 to 44 years of age and earning over $15,000, only 3 percent are single. For women there is a marked contrast: 17.4 percent in this income range are single. The same finding applies to education, especially graduate training. Among women in this age bracket who have completed 5 years or more of college education, 18.8 percent remain single while the corresponding figure is only 8.4 percent for men. At the lower end of the income and education scale, however, it is clear that men without incomes or with very low earnings are more likely to be single than their female counterparts, and this same trend, although not so pronounced, follows for education.

TABLE 3B

Percent of Persons 35 to 44 Years Old Who Are Single By Income and Sex: 1970

All Races	Males % Single	Females % Single
Without Income	43.6	1.9
With Income		
$1 to $999 or less	33.2	4.9
$1,000 to $2,999	21.6	8.4
$3,000 to $4,999	13.1	6.1
$5,000 to $6,999	8.6	9.7
$7,000 to $9,999	5.7	15.8
$10,000 to $14,999	3.7	22.2
$15,000 or more	3.0	17.4
Number	884,372	672,255
% of total 35 to 44 years who are single	7.9	5.7

SOURCE: *Marital Status*, pp. 181-222.

These features of material well-being are reinforced by statistics on mental health. In a series of selected symptoms of psychological distress reported by Clarice Stoll, single women show less signs of disturbance than single men. In fact, working and single women have less psychological discomfort than single or married men. It is only nonworking housewives who evidence greater problems than men.

This type of finding which was popularized by Betty Friedan in *The Feminine Mystique* seems to be one reason why women and men are reassessing their attitudes toward marriage, career, and children. In the poll cited above the participants were asked to choose between a traditional marriage where the husband assumes the responsibility for providing for the family and the wife runs the house and cares for the children, and a marriage where husband and wife share responsibilities — both work, both share homemaking and child responsibilities. Of the 96 percent of women who would choose to marry, 50 percent would find the traditional way more satisfying while 46 percent would prefer the sharing concept. Among the 92 percent of men who opt for marriage, 48 percent chose the former and 44 percent the latter marital arrangement. If these views are truly representative of the majority of Americans, especially the young, we can expect to see major changes in the institution of the family. The data suggest that a significant movement of women into the labor force is under way, even for women in the childbearing years. (See Table 4, top of page 4.)

TABLE 4

Percent of Married Women, Husband Present, in the Labor Force, by Age and Race: 1970 - 1940

Age	1970 Total	1970 White	1970 Black and other races	1940 Total	1940 White	1940 Black and other races
Total, 16 years and over	39.2	38.2	49.8	13.8	12.5	27.3
16 and 17 years	20.8	20.6	21.9	6.1	4.2	13.4
18 and 19 years	39.4	39.6	37.4	10.3	8.7	18.6
20 to 24 years	46.3	45.7	51.9	17.3	16.2	25.7
25 to 29 years	37.6	35.9	53.9	18.5	17.1	31.1
30 to 34 years	38.4	36.5	55.3	17.6	16.3	31.8
35 to 44 years	45.6	44.4	56.7	15.3	13.8	30.5
45 to 54 years	47.3	46.7	54.3	11.1	10.1	25.5
55 to 59 years	39.9	39.5	45.8	8.0	7.3	20.7
60 to 64 years	27.6	27.1	34.1	5.8	5.2	17.1
65 years and over	8.0	7.9	12.9	2.8	2.4	9.9

SOURCE: *We, the American Women*, U.S. Department of Commerce, Social and Economic Statistics Administration, Bureau of the Census, March 1973, p. 6.

Also, with smaller families appearing to become the norm, women will have more time for careers and it is to be expected that greater numbers of women will pursue this option.

TABLE 5

Number of Children Expected By Young Wives
1967 - 1975

Age of Wives	Expecting 2 or less 1975	1967
18-24 years	74%	45%
25-29 years	67%	37%
30-34 years	53%	35%
	Expecting 3 or more	
	1975	**1967**
18-24 years	26%	54%
25-29 years	33%	63%
30-34 years	47%	65%

SOURCE: *We, The Americans, Young Marrieds*, U.S. Bureau of the Census, June 1973, p. 14; *Population Profile of the United States*, U.S. Bureau of the Census, p. 20, No. 292, Current Population Reports, 1976.

This seems to be substantiated in the *Virginia Slims Poll* where 52 percent of the women indicated that combining marriage, career, and children would offer them the most satisfying and interesting life. It is to be expected that an increasing number of couples will choose to have no children although this group still appears slight. Only 5 percent of the women polled indicated that they would not like to have children in their marriage. An important point, however, is that the issue is being discussed. Within the last four years the *National Organization for Non-Parents* was formed and has 2000 members nationwide dedicated to the proposition that if a couple does not want children they should not feel guilty about it or be forced into having children by societal pressures. It is too early to predict whether or not this movement will gain any momentum, but it is receiving press coverage and has attracted some notable persons into its ranks.

Finally, women's liberation is another movement that has raised numerous questions about marriage, children, and careers. It is expected that as more women become aware of the many issues being discussed and the sex discrimination that they are exposed to, they will rethink the assumption that a woman's place is in the home. (See: Population Profile Number 15, "Women In American Society: A Historical and Demographic Profile.")

Many of these topics are interrelated with the phenomenon of divorce. Therefore let us consider whether divorce is threatening the stronghold of the American family.

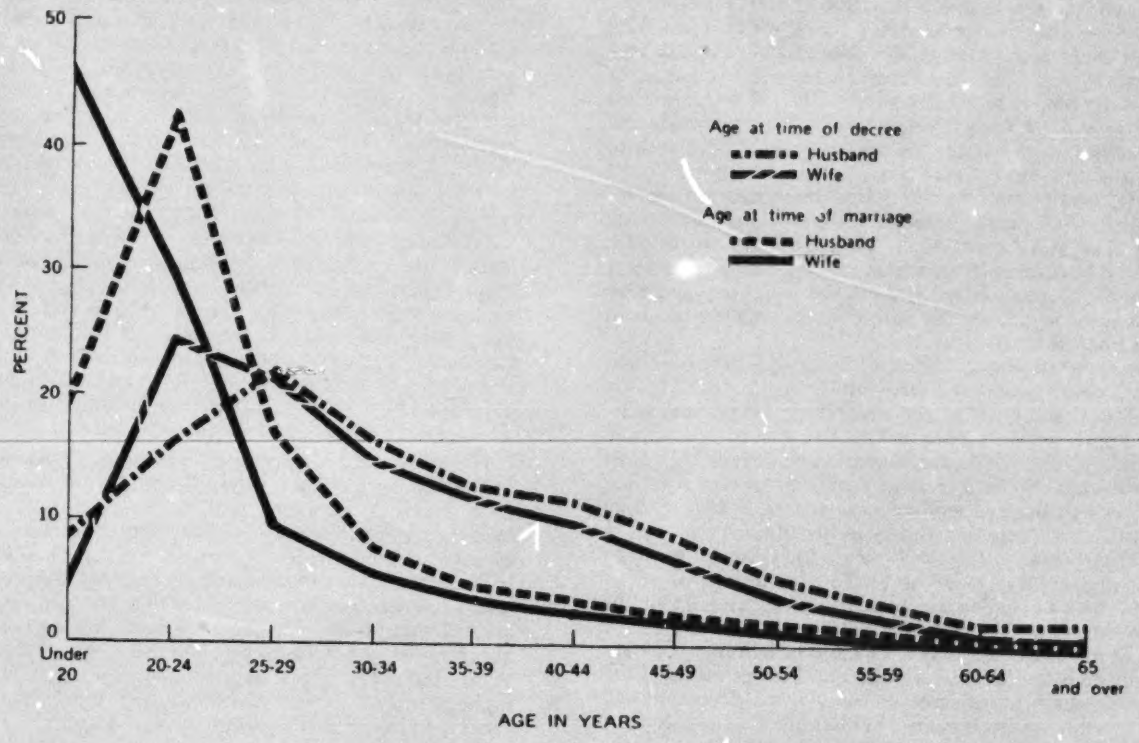
DIVORCE — AN ACCEPTABLE SOLUTION?

The one set of statistics which has been used most widely to predict the imminent collapse of the American family is the number of divorces occurring in recent years. For example, suppose one takes the number of marriages for 1975 (2,196,000) and the number of divorces, (988,000) and concludes that 45 percent of marriages end in divorce. Is that a valid procedure? Obviously not, since that number of divorces affects persons married over a period of many years, not just in 1975. We must look at the rate per 1,000 persons in the population to determine if an increase in divorces has occurred. Before attempting that analysis, it seems appropriate to consider some current views about divorce.

William Goode comments: "Of course, divorce is one of the major solutions for an intense degree of marital disharmony and is to be found in most societies and nations. Yet I know of no contemporary society, primitive or industrialized, in which divorce is actually valued." Nevertheless, according to John Scanzoni, the notion that divorced persons have lapsed morally or are suspect has virtually disappeared from contemporary society. This has probably been facilitated by changes in the grounds for

CHART 2

Percent distribution of divorces by age of husband and wife at time of decree and at time of marriage: divorce-registration area, 1969.



SOURCE: U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, *Vital and Health Statistics*, Series 21, No. 22, "Divorces: Analysis of Changes, United States, 1969." U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., April, 1973, p. 6.

divorce, as noted by Jessie Bernard. "The trend nowadays is no longer to think in terms of violation of a commitment but in terms of incompatibility, a state of affairs rather than a violation of a promise." According to Paul Glick about half of the states now have some form of "no-fault" divorce and 5 states have "complete no-fault" which means that either party can get a divorce without offering grounds and neither party is considered guilty.

Comparing legal grounds for dissolution over the past one hundred years points out some of these changes. From 1867 to 1886 adultery accounted for 24.6 percent of divorces while in 1965 only 1.4 percent were terminated for this reason. Desertion or abandonment also declined from 44.1 percent to 13.8 percent, while cruelty (mental and physical) rose from 16.3 percent to 41.7 percent. These figures do not imply that there is less adultery and desertion in contemporary society, but do indicate that the courts are becoming more flexible in the interpretation of admissible grounds for divorce. This trend has probably served to reduce the moral overtones of divorce and to protect the reputations of the couples while shielding any children involved in the break-up from unnecessary public ridicule because of their parents' behavior. It seems likely that this type of change will become more widespread in future years.

What do Americans think of divorce? In the *Virginia Slims Poll* 60 percent of the women and 59 percent of the men queried favor divorce as a solution for an unsuccessful marriage. Does this mean that the value of permanence has been replaced by pragmatism in contemporary society? According to Scanzoni "most American (perhaps Western) couples cling to both types of values with virtually equal strength, in *seemingly paradoxical fashion*. We could assume that persons begin marriage holding to the ideal of permanence, but at the same time, in the back of their minds they also hold the notion of pragmatism."

Looking at divorce statistics for selected years from 1867 to 1976, it is obvious that more Americans are choosing to divorce rather than to remain in marriages that are not satisfactory or happy. There has been a relatively steady rise in the numbers and rate of divorce, with several notable exceptions. In 1946 the rapid increase was probably due to the dissolution of hasty marriages entered into during wartime or those adversely affected by long separations occasioned by overseas service. In 1968 a marked upswing was evident, and by 1976 the divorce rate in the United States was at its highest point in history.

Does this indicate a collapse of marriage? According to Scanzoni the statistics are subject to many kinds of error and misinterpretation because of societal changes in the last century. As noted above, courts and legislatures have been more lenient in allowing divorces. Therefore, some of the increase must be due to this factor. Also, in the 1960s with the establishment of Legal Services to assist the poor, persons previously unable to afford a legal divorce could obtain free counsel. (According to the American Civil Liberties Union Handbook, *The Rights of Women*, a fairly standard range for the cost of a simple, uncontested divorce is from three to five hundred dollars). Previous to this period many individuals resorted to a "poor person's divorce" — *desertion*. Likewise, a growing societal ac-

ceptance of divorce as an alternative seems evident. Couples are no longer expected to live in quiet desperation to save face in the community. Finally, life expectancy must be considered when any comparison of divorce rates with an earlier era is made. In 1900 the average life expectancy for white males was 48.2 years, while it was 32.5 years for other racial groups. For white females it was 51.1 years and 35 years for other races. In 1971 the averages for males were 68.3 and 61.2 years, while for females they were 75.6 and 69.3 years respectively. The implication of this change is aptly stated by Jessie Bernard: "A vow to remain together until death parted them was not so hard for brides and grooms to take when death was not far off. Childbirth, for instance, exacted an enormous toll among women. The story revealed by New England tombstones shows that in colonial days a man might go through several wives in his lifetime. In those days, the serial polygamy we now speak of in connection with divorce was the result of death rather than divorce."

Also, as noted above, the children of the "Baby Boom" era are now maturing, many have probably already married, and some are in the divorce courts by this time. For example, persons born in the late forties are now in their mid to late twenties, the years when divorce is most likely to occur. Since there was a high birth rate from the late 1940s through 1958 we can expect a higher than average divorce rate for the next decade.

Are these reasons the only ones which can be given to explain the increase in divorce? To determine this let us consider which couples are most likely to end up in the divorce courts.

Age at marriage is a major variable in helping us to understand divorce. In 1969 almost one-fifth of all men and almost one-half of all women who were divorced had married while in their teens, and another 40 percent of men and 30 percent of women had married in their early twenties. (See Chart 2, top of page 5).

When we consider long range trends the same finding occurs. According to a 1967 U.S. Census report, "27 percent of the women with teenage marriages were known to have been divorced within 20 or more years, as compared with 14 percent of those who entered first marriage after they had reached their twenties." For men, "28 percent of those who married before the age of 22 years were known to have been divorced, as compared with 13 percent of those who married for the first time after they had reached 22 years of age." Can we take this finding to mean that age alone is the major factor in predicting marital dissolution?

Educational attainment also appears to be related to marital stability. According to government statistics those with 5 years or more of college have the highest percentage married only once and the lowest percentage separated or divorced. Since those who marry very young are less likely to obtain an advanced education, the probability of divorce is further heightened. (See Tables 6 and 7, page 7).

Husband's income also seems to be related to marital status. Men who have been married once have higher median earnings than those who have been divorced or married more than once. Hugh Carter and Paul Glick point out that men in professional and technical occupations registered the highest proportion (84%) still living with their first wife. They also had the highest levels of education and earnings. The relationship among education, earnings, and occupation seems to be evident.

If lower levels of education, occupation, and income are associated with higher rates of divorce, it should follow that black Americans will experience more marital breakups since they are over-represented at the lower ends of each of these scales. According to the 1970 Census of those persons ever married 14 years of age and older, 13.6 and 13.9 percent of white males and females respectively are known to have been divorced while among black males and females the figures are 17.8 and 18.4 percent. Rather than blame the black family for its own troubles and higher rates of divorce and separation, it seems more convincing to relate at least some of these happenings to social and economic deprivation and discrimination. Even controlling for age and education, blacks make less money than their white counterparts. Also, approximately one-third of blacks have incomes below the government's official poverty level, unemployment tends to run twice the national average, and recent estimates set the teenage figure at 40 percent. (See Table 8, page 7. See also Population Profile 10, "Black America").

As these findings strongly suggest, it is not age per se that places an undue burden on marriages, but the fact that younger persons who do marry generally must foresake higher education, settle for a job which probably demands little or no skill, and is, therefore, a dead-end as far as advancement and increased income are concerned. And to add to this depressing array of facts there is the strong likelihood that a teenage marriage may occur because of a premarital conception. The government reports: "Marriage because of pregnancy is not uncommon among teenagers. According to data from the 1964-66 National Natality Survey, 42 percent of the women 15-19 years for whom the interval from first marriage to legitimate first birth was reported had been married for less than 8 months. If these approximations held in 1968, and assuming that most of the first births tabulated as being within 8 months of first marriage were premarital conceptions, somewhere in the neighborhood of 60 percent of the infants born to teenage mothers that year were conceived out of wedlock." It must be noted, however, that with the legalization of abortion, these figures may change. In any event what romance comics and magazines portray as ardent young love may in many instances be a young couple hastily marrying to placate parents and protect reputations. With any or all of these strikes against them, it is a wonder that any teenage marriage survives. With such circumstances in view, according to a recent New York Times article, California passed a state law in 1970 requiring any couple, one member of which is under 18 years of age, to receive premarital

TABLE 6

Education As a Factor In Marriage Stability: 1970
(Persons 20 to 34 Years Old)

Years of School Completed	Total Ever Married	Married Once Spouse Present	Separated	Ever Divorced
Elementary School 8 years	1,342,000	73.7%	5.4%	18.0%
High School 4 years	13,454,000	82.3%	2.7%	11.1%
College 5 years or more	1,451,000	89.7%	1.2%	6.0%

SOURCE: *We, The Americans, Young Marrieds*, U.S. Bureau of the Census, June, 1973, p. 12.

TABLE 7

Median Income in 1969 of Males 14 Years Old and Over
By Marital Status and Race: 1970

	Married Once	Divorced	Married More Than Once	Known to Have Been Divorced
Total Males: 14 years and over	$8,125	$5,688	$6,878	$7,147
White Males	$8,357	$5,919	$7,290	$7,483
Negro Males	$5,483	$4,286	$4,328	$4,873

SOURCE: U.S. Bureau of the Census, Census of the Population: 1970, *Marital Status*, Final Report, PC(2)-4C, U.S. Government Printing Office, pp. 181-222.

TABLE 8

Median Earnings in 1969
and
Educational Attainment of Persons 35 to 54 Years Old
Who Worked Year Round in 1969, by Sex and Race: 1970

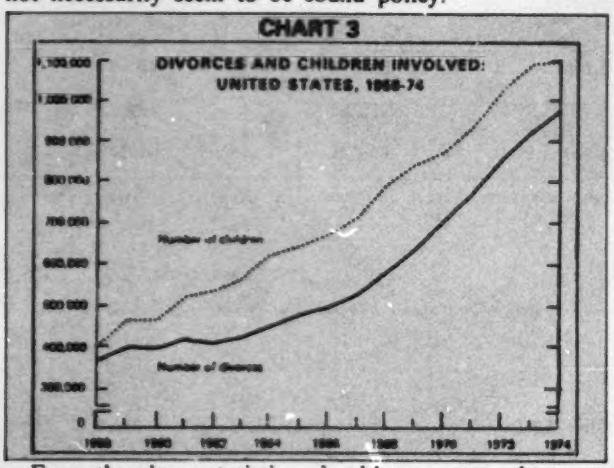
	Male			Female		
Area and Education	Negro	White	Ratio: Negro to White	Negro	White	Ratio: Negro to White
Total	$6,403	$9,738	.66	$3,901	$4,966	.79
Elementary: 8 years or less	5,200	7,422	.70	2,630	4,038	.65
High School: 1 to 3 years	6,462	8,775	.74	3,607	4,471	.81
4 years	7,400	9,651	.77	4,583	5,112	.90
College: 1 to 3 years	8,193	11,500	.71	5,670	5,776	.98
4 years	9,327	14,591	.64	7,293	7,294	1.00
5 years or more	12,277	16,763	.73	9,105	9,300	.98

SOURCE: U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Reports, Series P-23, No. 46, *The Social and Economic Status of the Black Population in the United States, 1972*, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., 1973, p. 26.

counseling as a condition for the court to grant permission to marry. Previous to this law 40 percent of the divorces in the state were accounted for by teenage marriages. Surprisingly, there has been little opposition to the law, either from parents or couples. Perhaps it signifies a future trend for the country, especially if it proves to be successful in California.

In general, what do we know about the average couple who divorces? In 1970 the median ages of husband and wife at the time of the decree were 32.9 and 29.8 years respectively. Of those divorcing in 1974 for whom age was reported, 41 percent of the men and 52 percent of the women were under 30 years of age, and 72 percent of the men and 79 percent of the women were under age 40. Data indicate that 31 percent of the marriages that were ended by divorce in 1974 had lasted less than 4 years; 40 percent less than 5 years; and 66 percent lasted less than 10 years, and the median duration of marriage prior to divorce in 1974 was 6.5 years. In 1974, 42 percent of divorcing couples had no children under 18 years of age; 26 percent had one child; 19 percent had two children; and 14 percent had three or more children. The number of children affected by divorce has increased to an estimated 1,099,000 in 1974 alone (up from 562,000 in 1963). The average number of children per decree has continued to decline, however, to 1.12 in 1974, compared with 1.36 in 1964. (Earlier years show a lower average, e.g., 0.85 in 1953). The popular belief that divorce adversely affects children does not appear to be substantiated by research cited by Duberman. "Children from divorced homes show no more psychological damage than children in intact unhappy homes." Staying together for the sake of the children does not necessarily seem to be sound policy.

CHART 3



From the above statistics, should we assume that most marriages are heading for divorce? According to Scanzoni four out of five marriages remain intact through middle-age and beyond. Before 65 years of age one out of five marriages will be dissolved by death or divorce. A 1967 study found that of all ever-married persons under seventy, 15 percent of the men and 17 percent of the women had been divorced, therefore it appears that divorce rather than death accounts for a greater number of marital terminations before age seventy. When we compare these figures with the unreliable ones obtained by dividing yearly divorces by yearly marriages, we can see that for the United States it is misleading and even fallacious to say that one of every two or three marriages will end in divorce. It is accurate to note that the numbers and rate of divorce have risen quite dramatically, but it seems likely that much of this increase can be explained by the factors noted above. One further proof that marriage as an institution is not disappearing in America is the rate of remarriage of both divorced and widowed persons.

Leslie Westoff notes that for increasing numbers of people the first marriage is the training school for the second, with divorce the diploma. Government statistics indicate that those who do divorce are marrying again and sooner after the termination of their first union. In the period from 1960-1966 three out of ten divorced men remarried in the first year after their divorce. Approximately one-quarter of those not remarried by the end of the first year did so by the end of the second, so that one-half of divorced men were remarried by the end of that time. In 1950-1959, a similar proportion of divorced men had remarried by the end of the fourth or early part of the fifth year after divorce. For women the same trends are evident. In the 1960-1966 period, one-quarter remarried in the first year and by the end of the third year, one-half were remarried. In 1950-1959 one woman in six married again in the first year, and by the end of the fifth year, one-half were remarried.

Recent data show that remarriage rates continue to be high. In 1974, the rates for those under twenty-five years were 336.3 per 1,000 for previously divorced women and 365.8 for previously divorced men. Also, the median age for remarriage has moved steadily downward over the decade, dropping in 1974 3.5 years for brides to 32.1 years, and 4.1 years for grooms to 35.7 years.

TABLE 9

Median Ages of Men and Women at Remarriage, 1963-74: Marriage-Registration Area

Year	Men	Women
1974	35.7	32.1
1973	36.3	32.3
1972	36.5	32.8
1971	36.9	32.9
1970	37.5	33.3
1969	38.2	33.8
1968	38.3	33.8
1967	38.1	35.0
1966	39.2	35.2
1965	39.6	35.5
1964	39.7	35.6
1963	39.8	35.6

SOURCE: Monthly Vital Statistics, Summary Report, Final Marriage Statistics, 1974, Vol. 25, No. 2, Supplement, May 5, 1976, p. 1.

For the widowed population, men are more likely to remarry than women at every age. This can be explained by a number of factors, especially differential life expectancy. Women live longer than men on the average, consequently there are many more widows (approximately three times the number) than widowers. Also, societal norms accept and encourage the marriage of a younger woman with an older man while frowning on the reverse. Therefore, since the pool of available men shrinks due to death at the older ages, the older man can choose a spouse from any age group. This differential is borne out by recent data: the median age of brides was 1.9 years younger than that of grooms at first marriage, 3.6 years younger at remarriage after divorce, and 7.3 years younger at remarriage after widowhood. (See Table 10, top of page 9).

TABLE 10

Remarriage Rates[1] For Previously Widowed and Divorced, By Sex: Marriage-Registration Area: 1974

	Women		Men	
Remarriages	Number	Rate	Number	Rate
Total	493,841	40.0	514,163	129.1
Median Age	32.1	—	35.7	—
Previously Widowed	73,530	9.1	62,890	38.9
Median Age	51.9	—	59.2	—
Previously Divorced	348,007	121.7	376,026	198.7
Median Age	30.0	—	33.6	—

[1]Rates per 1,000 population in specified group.

SOURCE: Monthly Vital Statistics, Summary Report, Final Marriage Statistics, 1974, Vol. 25, No. 2, Supplement, May 5, 1976.

Glick notes that four out of five persons who get divorced are remarrying, but the data on success of these unions remains inconclusive. Westoff indicates that there are a number of problems which these new "blended" or "reconstituted" families must face, especially if there are children from a previous marriage, but individuals continue to remarry in any event. She concludes: "For the moment, however, the high rate of remarriage in America indicates that we still believe in marriage in some form. At the same time we seem to be more tolerant of persons who depart from the accepted patterns of the past. Our attitudes toward other lifestyles are broadening, and this includes the second marriage, for those who can't maintain the traditional first marriage. For some time to come, it will probably mean for many a second chance to find the good life."

ALTERNATE LIFE STYLES

In the past decade we have heard that the nuclear family is being replaced by different forms of "living together." As the extended family of preindustrial times gave way to the nuclear family, now the prediction is that the latter too is disappearing. As you might have concluded from the statistics presented on marriage, divorce, and remarriage, this allegation does not appear to be substantiated. What does seem to be the case is that alterations within marriage are occurring and many taboo subjects are now openly discussed from a very sophisticated perspective. Masters and Johnson's *Human Sexual Response* was well received and since its publication marriage and sex clinics have proliferated throughout the country. Recently Alex Comfort's *The Joy of Sex* headed the best seller list, and other manuals crowd the bookshelves in very respectable stores. At the other extreme, the growth of pornography, erotic films, and forms of adult entertainment attest to the fact that the rigid moral outlook of the Victorian era is waning. Yet because of this general relaxation, we cannot conclude that marriage and family are disintegrating.

How did the respondents in the *Virginia Slims Poll* feel about alternate life styles? As we noted above, the majority of women and men (96 and 92 percent) chose marriage as the most satisfying and interesting way of life. Only 1 percent of the women (2 percent in the 18-29 year age bracket) and 3 percent of the men (8 percent under 29 years) would opt for living with someone of the opposite sex, but not marrying. One percent of each sex would choose to remain single and live alone, and less than 1 percent of each sex would remain single and live with others of the same sex, or live in a big family of people with similar interests, in which some of the people are married and some are not. It is clear from these data (if we can generalize) that there is no great rush into new life styles. It is interesting to note, however, that greater numbers of young people are more accepting of living together without a legal marriage.

It should not be surmised, however, that premarital sexual behavior is a new phenomenon. In 1948 Alfred Kinsey and his associates published *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* and in 1953 *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female*. These reports shocked the American public and numerous attempts were made to discredit their methodology and findings. In any event they had important things to say about sexual behavior in the United States. Their findings showed that 50 percent of all the women that they had studied who had ever married had premarital intercourse and the rate for men was over 90 percent. Other major studies conducted previous to Kinsey appear to substantiate these findings. According to sociologist Robert Bell, data from Davis, Hamilton, Herman, and Burgess and Wallin point to increased rates of premarital coitus in the twentieth century. Both the Herman and Kinsey findings put the rates at about 50 percent for women born after 1900.

Kinsey also found that by age forty, 26 percent of married women in his sample and 50 percent of the married men had an extramarital coital experience. What these figures suggest is that sexual behavior is probably not changing appreciably, but a more tolerant and accepting climate allows persons to discuss and experience sexual behavior more openly. Even with this change, there is evidence from the *Virginia Slims Poll* to suggest resistance to changing sexual codes. Fifty-three percent of the women and 44 percent of the men polled believe that premarital sex is immoral. When asked the effects of the new sexual morality, only 17 percent of the women and 21 percent of the men (34 and 37 percent for those under 29 years) believe that it will make for better, more successful marriages. Therefore, while there is resistance, we can see that younger persons seem more open to the idea of change. Yet, from the data considered, it appears that more Americans will end up getting married, perhaps after a period of living together, but married nevertheless.

Communes were widely publicized in the 1960s as many middle class young people became disenchanted with materialism and war, but communes were not new to the American landscape. There were communities founded by the Shakers, Robert Owen in Indiana, and by others who wished to establish their own form of life. There probably will be communes in every era, but there is little evidence to suggest that it is becoming a chosen way of life for many persons. According to Scanzoni one of the major problems with most communes is that they deny equal status to women. Therefore, he believes that any new family form to be developed must deal with this basic structural problem.

One interesting development in this area is the increase in urban communes where groups of persons of all ages come together for a form of community life while continuing to work at their usual "city jobs." It is possible that this type of communal arrangement will become more widespread, especially as the anonymity of the cities becomes more oppressive.

Group marriage, an arrangement whereby several men and women are married to one another, are sexually active within the group, and share communal children, seems quite rare. According to Albert Ellis such marriages have difficulty in lasting for more than a few years. Other research, however, suggests that there is stability and permanence in some of these marriages. But there seems to be agreement that this type of life style is fitted for, and will attract, very few followers.

Homosexual marriage has been a topic of much discussion in recent years with the development of Gay Liberation and the recognition that homosexuals do constitute a sizable minority in American society. Estimates vary but the Kinsey data put the figures for males who are exclusively homosexual at 3-4 percent and 1-2 percent for females (The percentages of both sexes who indicated that they had at least one homosexual experience were much higher). These figures seem small, yet when they are translated into numbers, 5 percent of the population is over ten million persons. Also, since homosexual behavior is outlawed in the majority of states, many persons may carefully hide their sexual orientation, therefore the percentage may be much higher. While there is some evidence that job bias is easing against homosexuals, and some stereotypes of the homosexual male and lesbian are being broken down by the "coming out" of respected persons who are gay, it seems that many more changes and widespread education about homosexuality are needed to dispel centuries of myths. During 1975 several homosexual marriages were held legally in Colorado, but there is little evidence that the practice is becoming widespread. However, it is probable that many couples are living in homosexual relationships with or without legal sanctions, and it is likely that, as better research becomes available to break down assumptions about gay persons, they will be accorded full legal rights and gradual acceptance by the society.

Within conventional marriages there is a new craze which appears to be relatively popular, swinging. It involves a married couple's willingness to swap sexual partners either with persons they know or total strangers and this activity often takes place at a swinging party. According to Jessie Bernard most studies indicate that the participants are middle class, young, married four to five years, have children, and most women are housewives. From research conducted by the Breedgloves and published in 1964, it was conservatively estimated that two and one-half million couples exchange partners on a somewhat regular basis. Later research by James and Lynn Smith suggests that swinging will attract 15 to 20 percent of married couples under most favorable conditions, but all will not engage in it for a prolonged period. Nevertheless, it is happening and perhaps indicates some movement away from the exclusivity of monogamy for some, while these couples retain the semblance of a traditional marriage.

Finally, is there any truth in the allegation that Americans are moving toward serial monogamy: that is, one legal marriage after another? Some Hollywood stars have been responsible, indirectly, for this belief. Since these persons receive much publicity when they marry, divorce, and remarry, it is assumed that serial relationships are widespread. This notion is not supported as Scanzoni points out. "The evidence, however, is contrary to any image of widespread mate-hopping even among the divorced. Government data indicate that approximately 75 percent of all Americans who obtain divorces each year are ending their first marriage. Around 20 percent of those getting divorced are ending a second marriage. Only a tiny fraction of persons who divorce each year are ending a third marriage, and the proportion of those ending a fourth (or more) marriage is infinitesimal." Therefore, serial monogamy does not appear to be a reality. Rather, as we have seen, many first marriages which did end in divorce were contracted when couples were young and struggling economically, while second marriages are entered into later and tend to be more stable.

What, then, is the outlook for the American institution of marriage and the family? It seems that these life styles will be with us for some time, but not without some changes. We will probably see more young couples living together before entering into a legal marriage. Also, there is some discussion about substituting renewable marriage contracts which would allow a couple to live together for a certain time period, at the end of which they could choose whether or not to renew their commitment. Jessie Bernard speaks of a series of options which could be available: childless liaisons, temporarily permanent marriages to allow for child rearing, and for middle age and beyond, new forms of relationships, perhaps even polygynous ones. This may not be unrealistic considering the number of widows as opposed to widowers in American society and the increasingly difficult time that the elderly are having in financial matters. There have been some instances recorded where older persons are choosing to live together rather than marry so that each one can continue to get his/her full Social Security benefits, rather than a couple's payment which would be less.

The data on swinging and extramarital sexual behavior strongly suggest a movement away from exclusivity of sexual partners, but it should be noted that adultery is still a criminal offense in most areas and it will be some time before legal and social sanctions against extramarital affairs have disappeared.

As the divorce rate attests, Americans are now choosing to end unhappy or unfulfilling marriages, and societal sanctions against divorce are rapidly giving way to a climate of acceptance. As divorce gets easier to obtain we can expect that more persons will choose this option, but it seems likely that many who do end one marriage will become involved in another.

Finally, what about the traditional marriage? As we noted above we can expect a change in the roles of wife and husband, mother and father. Women seem more intent on pursuing careers and sharing household tasks and child rearing responsibilities with their mates. It is likely that we may witness an increase in househusbands or at least a part-time arrangement whereby each spouse works for a portion of the year. Increased day care facilities seem likely and this would ease child care duties for mother and father. Perhaps we will see a move toward greater sharing of resources within the urban and suburban neighborhoods, but it seems that our ideology of private households and home ownership will remain intact for some time.

The future seems to hold more flexibility both within and outside of marriage. Roles of men and women should continue to undergo change and many of the traditional duties assigned previously to one sex will be reassigned according to personal tastes, abilities, and sensitivities. It seems that many of the changes which have been discussed do not predict the downfall of the family and society, but rather a more humanizing climate in which individuals can develop to their fullest potential.

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